



Freeway's citizen group struggles with membership

Now, freeway panel can't muster quorum

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The reconstituted South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team recently expanded its membership, hoping to solicit more input on the proposed freeway through Ahwatukee Foothills.

But the group is so big now that it can't get enough members to attend meetings and vote on key issues.

Twelve members were no-shows at last month's meeting at the Arizona Department of Transportation's offices in downtown Phoenix.

The missing members included representatives from the Kyrene Elementary School District, several Laveen groups in the southwest Valley and a member of the Gila River Indian Community.

The group will attempt another meeting on Thursday at ADOT, 206 South 17th Ave.

It spent most of a late May meeting arguing about where it should meet in the future and what issues it should discuss. Some lobbied for meetings to be held at the Pecos Community Center in Ahwatukee Foothills.

John Rodriguez, an Ahwatukee resident and SMCAT member representing the Lakewood Community Association, said the group should consider meeting in Ahwatukee Foothills to boost attendance.

"I'm driving here for the 10,000 people I represent," he said, arguing that other members should look at their larger constituencies.

But Peggy Eastburn of the Estrella Village Planning Committee steadfastly opposed meeting in Ahwatukee.

"No, the last time I drove to Ahwatukee it took me two hours," she said.

"And to say only Ahwatukee people are interested in these meetings is not true."

Don Jones, of the Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce, also objected to making the drive.

"I would not drive across town. Period. The cost of fuel being where it is . . . "

Sandy Bahr, conservation outreach director for the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, suggested a compromise by offering to carpool with other members in her alt-fuel Toyota Prius from her home in central Phoenix.

She also said the group represents more than residents in Ahwatukee or the Valley because the freeway is a regional issue affecting all motorists and citizens.

The original group that met to recommend a west-side freeway alignment had 22 members. But the committee was scaled back to 18 members when it reconvened in late March after a yearlong hiatus.

At that point, members argued for expanding membership to include representatives from Chandler, the East Valley Partnership, the Chandler Chamber of Commerce, the Maricopa County Asthma Association and various medical groups and homeowners associations.

Estrella's Eastburn said the group wouldn't be faced with the quorum quandary if it hadn't expanded its membership.

"The people who aren't here are the ones who voted for it, and they don't show," she said.

ADOT has been studying options for an east-side alignment for the Ahwatukee leg of the South Mountain Freeway to complete the Loop 202, which was designed to ring the Valley.

The only alignment seriously being studied in Ahwatukee runs along Pecos Road. If built there, ADOT would raze about 250 homes.

What do you think?

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Your comments

The members that don't want to spend the time and money to be on this committee should resign immediately.

To the chairman of this committee. We now have the technology to teleconference. (Agusto3243, June 4, 2007 08:26PM)

Define irony...

I think it's interesting that they are SO worried about the freeway that they can't be bothered to drive a couple hours and spend a couple bucks.

I guess they don't care that much after all. (James9415, June 4, 2007 01:41PM)

And these are the people planning our future transportation.

God help us all.(**Sam1222**, June 4, 2007 10:35AM)

Why do people become members of groups like this and then not expect to put in necessary time and maybe drive to a meeting? How would you like the guy who said "I would not drive across town. Period. The cost of fuel being where it is . . ." represent your area?(**Larry4698**, June 4, 2007 09:46AM)

It's hilarious to me that the woman opposed to building a freeway to Ahwatukee won't attend the meeting because it takes her two hours to get there.

Hilarious.(**Michael7763**, June 4, 2007 06:02AM)
